ML BULLETIN

Publication of the Magic Lantern Society
of the United States and Canada

Vol. III, No. 2, July 1981

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PILGRIMAGE
by Richard Balzer

Pilgrimage--the action of journeying, esp. as a devotee seeking a shrine; a long, weary journey as to a shrine.

It began quietly, as I suppose such things often do. There was no fanfare, just a whistle and a train slowly beginning to move. By 12:30 AM, on the morning of May 9, 1981, a half hour after having left London's Paddington Station, I was asleep in my couchette and on the beginning of a journey I had often thought about over the last five years. Nine hours later, having had a good night's sleep, I found myself in the picturesque shoreline village of St. Ives, Cornwall. The town was still asleep, as it was too early in the day for its merchants to open up and too early in the spring for flocks of tourists to fill its streets. I had come to visit the Barnes Museum of Cinematography.

It is difficult to pick up a book that has been written in the last twenty years about Magic Lanterns or the precursers of the movies without reading of the Barnes brothers and their museum. Famous as the museum is, it is not terribly accessible. While living in England for a year and a half, my wife and I talked of the trip but we never took it; and over the years, returning to England several times, we never found time to make the trip. But here I was in St. Ives at last, about to see this showcase of early optical toys and magic lanterns.

On the way to William Barnes' house I ran into John. For those of you who have never met the brothers Barnes, it is quite difficult at first glance to tell the twins apart.

Within an hour the three of us were sitting in William's St. Ives digs talking about lanterns and collecting. John left Bill and me to catch up on the year since we had last seen each other, and then it was a two-minute walk back to the museum for a before-hours tour.

Walking in the door one comes upon a beautiful early nineteenth century French print of "La Lanterne Magique" and a pair of motorized zoetropes to show the uninitiated what effects early motion could provide. Turning a corner one passes a Charlie Chaplin exhibit before coming upon examples of shadow puppets, silhouettes, silhouette slides, and early lantern slides with exchangeable metal sliding parts that I had never seen the likes of before. The walls are crowded with prints, and another large display case downstairs contains views for the "polyrama panoptique" and similar devices.

Upstairs the walls are jammed with displays and explanations. I passed an early peep show, prints of peep shows and lanterns, then some early lanterns and illuminants, more lanterns, slides, and optical toys, including an original set of Dr. Paris' thaumatropes, a lovely zoetrope and a wood-cased praxiniscope theatre. Continuing down the aisle I passed from pre-cinema to early movie machines.

All the time I was looking at the displays John and Bill were explaining little details, adding more history. I knew we were moving along, that time was passing, but all I could feel by the time we were back downstairs was a sensory overload--too much to take in too quickly. Soon Bill and I were headed back to his house for lunch.

Over Cornish pastries we talked more about their collection. Bill said there isn't enough space in the museum to house even a fraction of the collection. The collection is stored in a couple of buildings close by William's house. He asked if I'd like to look at some of the material: books, catalogues, slides and/or optical toys? Would I like to? Would a sugar addict like to be turned free at a Swiss chocolate factory? We began in an upstairs storeroom. Bill showed me a very early (circa 1800) phantasmagoria lantern. The lanterns were hard to get to, so we moved to a bookcase. Pick out a book, and next to it there is another edition of the same book and next to it another edition, each slightly different. Whereas I'm generally concerned with trying to get a single copy of a certain book, the goal of the Barnes' brothers is to have every edition of a particular book.

We weren't too deep into what seemed an endless supply of books before we decided to move downstairs to wander amongst

old cardboard boxes. All types, all shapes of boxes. What they had in common was that they were all filled with slides. One box might have a changing chromotrope, another dissolving views, a third double slippers. Soon John was with us. Bill went off to make afternoon tea while John continued where Bill had left off. Another box was opened. This one contained early silhouettes on glass. Then panoramas, and more dissolving sets. Across the crowded aisle were more boxes, containing optical toys. We picked up one box full of flipbooks, some very early, some late like the German "fliptease.'

By now Bill was signalling tea was ready. There was one more box John wanted to show me before tea, and the one became a second before we emerged to join Bill.

After tea, Bill went to see his mother and John and I returned to the museum so I could have a second look. This time, after meeting John's charming wife, I wound my way through the museum by myself, slowly taking in each case, reading the comments and looking with particular interest at the lanterns and slides. So much to take in and so little time! The space, so well organized, still seemed too small to encase this vast collection, and the stillness of the objects seemed a stark contrast to the liveliness of the material. John and I talked about this. He mentioned his dream of larger space in which displays could be changed and there could be more demonstrations of motion.

I thanked John and made my way back to Bill's to pour over two more boxes, one full of catalogues, the other ephemera, that we had earlier moved from the warehouse to his house. I opened the lid of the first box and found maybe thirty catalogues. No time to read in detail the different material, just looking through volume after volume, stopping briefly to read a little from a Riley Brothers operators guide or to look more carefully at an 1835 P. Carpenter catalogue. By now I realized little was registering in my mind, but I continued to want to see as much as I possibly could.

Exhausted, but wonderfully happy, I decided to take a last stroll around town. Having filled my lungs with air, I roamed back to see Bill for a last time. Soon he and John walked me back to the train. Too quick a visit, too much in too short a time. Twelve hours after arriving in St. Ives I was back on a train, this time headed overnight for London, and three hours after arriving back in London I would be headed for Heathrow and a plane back to New York. There would be time on the plane to think about my pilgrimage, achieved after so many years of anticipation.

ADDENDUM: THE MAGIC LANTERN AND THE PASSING SHOW

by Leora Wood Wells

In the April issue of the Bulletin, I wrote about the widespread use in the literature of earlier generations of magic lantern-related terms to convey the idea of "The Passing Show" of life. Now, the Washington Post Magazine has a regular column entitled "The Passing Show," using this term in exactly the same sense.

The New York Times has also demonstrated that familiar terms neither die nor fade away. On April 25, 1981, it carried a column entitled "Magic Lanterns" which turned out to be a review of a book called Masters: Portraits of Great Teachers. So here again, in the column title, we have a magic lantern term used in reference to something giving a series of quick impressions.

However, there was also a more direct connection. In the book, Helen Vendler recalled the teaching approach of I.A. Richards in his course on understanding poetry. To open up his students' minds and make them more receptive to poetry, he darkened the room and projected poems on a screen. This, his biographer said, reminded her of T.S. Eliot's line, "as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen."

Any of us who took courses in biology or art history in college were accustomed to the use of a projector as a teaching device, and whether our professors called them projectors or magic lanterns depended largely upon their ages and ours. Yet in 1961, the New York Times carried an article about an experimental "new" teaching technique used by Professor Edwin L. Peterson in a creative writing course. Recognizing that he had to see a manuscript to tell whether it was any good, Peterson decided the same thing was probably true of his students. So he not only projected their manuscripts, he projected symbols to help them recognize the strengths and weaknesses in their writing. He used abstract designs to demonstrate generality and lack of focus, and sharp designs and color to demonstrate lucid grammatical and literary construction.

Like the word "kleenex," "magic lantern" has become a generic term, sometimes used correctly and sometimes rather far from the mark, but always conveying a universally understood concept. In a 1967 feature article on a "bouyant, vibrant" young Washington socialite, the Post referred to her moods changing "as rapidly as a magic lantern."

A couple of years later, the term "phantasmagoria" hit new levels of popularity as discotheques with their rapidly changing psychedelic light shows burst upon the scene. One disco called "Phantasmagoria, Inc." had a full circle light show provided by eight projectors which also, at intervals, showed quick slide views of Charlie Chaplin, surfing scenes and epic monuments of various sorts.

By a strange grammatical osmosis, the "phantasmagoria" term was also used to describe the satin evening pants one wore to the discotheques. "There are wide, elephant leg trousers or the trumpet leg, which flares out from the knee," the Washington Post reported (12-1-68). "It's a total phantasmagoria effect."

Books like Robert Carson's 1952 novel, The Magic Lantern, often used the term to refer to the movies, and this distortion eventually carried over to television as well. In 1963, Washington Post columnist George Dixon reported that his wife had watched a political program until "the final magic lantern slide was shown." In 1969, the Post advertised a television special: "The H. Andrew Williams Magic Lantern Show Company."

Sometimes the use of the term requires a very broad stretch of the imagination. In 1971, Haverill's, in San Francisco, advertised an ordinary battery-powered emergency lamp as a "magic lantern." Four years later, Washington's Tiffany Tree advertised a table lamp with a built-in box for live plants. It was called--you guessed it!--a "magic plantern."

KOCH'S CORNER: THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

International Notes: The other day while attending a trade show at a local shopping center, I spoke to a member of the Japanese Consul's office. He spoke very good English. I presented him with one of my Magic Lantern Society cards. He examined it closely, scribbled some Japanese characters on a piece of paper, looked at me and said, "You call it a Magic Lantern. In Japan, we call it a WALKING HORSE LANTERN. I will pass your card on to someone in the photo business." Haven't heard from anyone, to date.

By-Laws: The by-laws are hereby adopted after a majority vote: 25 for, 2 opposed. Seventeen were ballots, the balance were letters. Your chairman found himself between a rock and a hard place because any decision was bound to make some people unhappy.

The by-laws provide for change, so those wanting additions, deletions or changes submit your proposals in by-law language to the Secretary. Proposals must be signed by six qualified members.

Election of Officers: The election process will begin immediately. Nominations are hereby requested for the offices of Chairman, Assistant Chairman, Secretary/Treasurer. Submit all nominations to the Secretary/Treasurer by October 1, 1981. Terms of office will commence January 1, 1982 and run for two years. After nominations are received, the Secretary will send out ballots for the vote. Please check with anyone you wish to nominate to be sure he or she is willing to accept the nomination.

Convention: Plans for the August convention are moving along well. There has been a slight change in the date. The college facilities are not available on Sunday; therefore, the convention will be compressed into two days, Friday August 21 and Saturday August 22.

By July 15, I plan to send out the program as now planned. There may be some changes, but we feel sure we are going to have two full days of interesting sessions. Our British members are scheduled for five presentations, and we have several talks and shows by U.S. members as well. Do try to come!

Please return your registration form, which will be sent with the program, as soon as you receive it, together with your registration fee (probably $10), what items you plan to bring for the auction, and what unusual items you are bringing to show. Send registrations to ED LENNERT, not to me.

THE BY-LAWS: AN EDITORIAL

by Leora Wood Wells

Our organization now has a set of by-laws adopted by an overwhelming majority of those who voted. Fewer than half of the members voted, but they constituted a respectable percentage when compared with voter turnouts for national elections.

It seems my husband and I cast one of only two opposition votes. We frankly find it hard to believe that the rest of you read the by-laws carefully. We are also puzzled by the fact that of the several members who expressed concern by letter or phone about specific points, all but one in addition to ourselves nevertheless either voted for the by-laws or didn't vote at all.

I'm sure all of us appreciate the good intentions, time and effort Bob Bishop put into developing the by-laws. However, we feel that a draft should have been reviewed by the entire membership and problems should have been corrected before the by-laws were sent out to be voted upon.

My husband and I, in fact, assumed that the version mailed out with the newsletter was a draft sent out for comments, and we developed a list of changes that needed to be made to clarify the organizational structure of the Society. These were based on many years of experience with struggling young organizations from PTAs and civic associations to national research foundations. Our goal was to try to spare this organization some of the growing pains other organizations have had to suffer through.

We know that at least one other member also wrote a carefully thought-out letter containing suggested changes. Although the Chairman indicated he agreed with many of the points raised, he felt it was too late to do anything about it other than pass the by-laws as written and begin the process of changing them.

To help you consider whether you feel changes are needed, here is a streamlined version of the points my husband and I raised:

Structure

Each topical point in the by-laws should be a separate, numbered unit. This makes changing them less complex.

Nominations

The by-laws contain no mechanism for nominations. The usual system in this kind of organization is for the President to appoint a 3-person nominating committee to come up with a slate of officers. To assure that all members have a voice in electing the officers if they care to exercise it, these nominations are then augmented by nominations from the membership at large.

All nominees should be contacted regarding their willingness to serve before their names are put on the ballot.

Election Process

Since annual meetings may or may not occur, and since the Bulletin appears only four times a year, all parts of the nomination and election process should be conducted independently of both.

Point 6 of the by-laws says officers are to be elected by a simple majority. Of what? Of the membership or of those voting? There's a big difference. What should constitute a reasonable quorum?

Dates of Elections

As written, the by-laws contain conflicting information on the dates of the elections. A permanent time schedule needs to be carefully thought through. Usually the by-laws of organizations in which the officers serve for two-year terms state that elections will be held on a certain date in odd or even years, depending upon when the first election occurs.

Ballot

Since each active member-family has only one vote, a signature should be required to avoid duplication or votes by non-members or delinquent members.

Changes to By-Laws

Point 6 says changes must be proposed by at least six members and submitted to the membership for a vote "upon acceptance by the Committee." Taken literally, this means the Board could veto any proposal it didn't like without submitting it to the membership.

The by-laws should stipulate one of the following methods:

The proposed changes should be a) sent to the members in a special mailing for a vote within a specified time; b) published in the next Bulletin with votes to be received within a specified time; or c) made part of the ballot at the next election. This third method would be the least expensive but also very slow.

Dues

To avoid the need for repeated changes in the by-laws, the method of setting dues should be spelled out but specific amounts should not be.

The officers should ahve the power to decide what the dues will be and to handle other financial matters, as provided in our by-laws, but most organizations require an annual financial report from the officers.

As a courtesy, it might be wise to indicate why dues for overseas members are more than for U.S. members (higher basic and airmail postage).

The ball is in your court. There is a mechanism for revision (see your copy of the by-laws and Joe's column above). Whether you choose to exercise it is up to you.

As Bob Bishop put it in a very nice letter I recently received from him, we may not always agree, but we are striving for the same goals. I think that applies to all members. What all of us want is a smoothly-functioning organization that will be, above all, fun for everyone and enable us to share our mutual interests in the magic lantern. That requires the active participation of members who are interested enough to devote time, effort and thought to making the whole thing work.

BOOKS OLD AND NEW

Dover Catalog. Any of you who have not seen Dover's Complete Catalog of Photography and Film Books should get hold of a copy. Write Dover Publications, Inc., 180 Varick Street, New York, New York 10014. This excellent reprint house produces very high quality books and brings out an unending flow of reprints of valuable classic reference books that are no longer in print in their original form. Many of the books relate directly or indirectly to magic lantern interests, such as the superb work of social reformer Jacob A. Riis, who used his stunning photographs of New York street life as the basis of his illustrated lectures.

MAGAZINE ARTICLE

All of you who are photography buffs should enjoy Peter E. Palmquist's article on "Audacious Image Makers" in the May-June 1981 issue of The American West (Box 40310 Tucson, Airzona 85717.) In it, he describes some of the thousands of portrait and landscape photographers who documented the early history of the West. Some of them ingeniously combined the practice of photography with other vocations such as dentistry and midwifery.

NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE: THE EDITOR'S SCRAPBOOK

The Maine Idea. As always when we are in Maine, we saw numerous magic lanterns and related items, most of them at outrageous prices. For example, in Bridgton we saw an upright red toy lantern, very rusty and in poor condition, for $135. By contrast, however, in Searsport we saw a Keystone movie projector for $7.50. In Hallowell we saw a zoetrope with most of its finish missing and a praxinoscope, both at prices that would give you nightmares. We saw a couple of EP lanterns in good condition, one in E. Sullivan (the common rectangular shape) with its box and slides; the other in Searsport (a globular red one). We also saw several Mirroscopes and other postcard projectors. So keep your eyes open when you travel. There are plenty of lanterns to be found. But hang onto your wallet and your common sense and talk the dealers into reasonable prices.

Speaking of Prices. The issue of the true value of antiques is a hot one, as an unfortunate donor discovered recently. Having given the Smithsonian Institution a silver candlestick thought to have been given to a Russian church by Catherine I,

the donor took a hefty tax deduction based on Sotheby's appraisal of $130,000. The IRS appraisers, however, valued it at only $18,000. But the bad news wasn't over yet. The IRS also called in a private appraiser -- an arch rival of Sotheby's -- who declared the candlestick had no artistic or historic significance and was worth only $2,000 to $3,000. At last report, a good deal of legal action was going on to straighten out the mess. The moral to this story is, if you have any notion of giving away your magic lantern collection, be mighty sure of the correctness of your appraised values or you may end up with an IRS claim for a lot of back taxes. The other side of the coin is, look into the question of appraised values as it relates to estate taxes your family may have to pay if they inherit your collection some day.

NOVA History of Photography Program. I hope all of you saw the excellent NOVA program called "Moving Still." In our area, it was telecast on May 19. Although it did not specifically mention magic lanterns, it contained much of interest to both m.l. buffs and photography buffs. It covered not only the familiar information about the pioneers of photography, but also dealt with high and low speed photographic techniques, using many segments from priceless early films. We were astonished that time lapse action films were achieved as early as they were. The scientific and artistic uses of super-accelerated motion pictures were equally impressive. Watch for this on reruns. It is really outstanding.

Northwest Group Meeting. Alice Koch reports that the quarterly meeting of the Northwest group met at the home of John and Betty Potter in Tacoma, Washington, on June 28. Attendees included three children of members as well as the adults. Bob Bishop reported on his and Carm's visit to the Northwest Film Center in Portland, Oregon, where Bob put on a show and was, in turn, shown philosophical slides and zoetropes. Jim Parker, who made a 500 mile round trip from North Bend, Oregon, to attend the meeting, described the lantern he inherited from his preacher-grandfather. It was made in London in the 1880's and has wood-mounted slides of Noah's Ark, Jonah and the Whale and other biblical scenes, plus some Civil War slides and a number of lever-type "occupational" slides of cobbler, dentist, blacksmith, etc. John Potter showed Civil War slides and scenes of Washington and Oregon, and Bob Bishop slowed slides of several major expositions.

Hard Luck. You'll all be sorry to learn that Bob Bishop tangled with a skill saw and suffered a severe injury to his thumb. The good news is that he expects eventually to have full use of it again. This problem and Carm's health have required the Bishops to cancel a planned cross-country magic lantern show tour they planned to give and possibly, their attendance at the convention. We hope they are both much improved and will be able to resume full activity soon.

German Trade Fairs. In April, the New York Times reported that trade fairs are booming in West Germany. Eighty-eight major international trade shows covering almost every major business sector were scheduled for this year. Wouldn't you love to go to Nuremberg's toy fair? Nuremberg, as most of you know, was the center of the toy industry in Germany during the 19th century, and was the major exporter of magic lanterns to this country. Unfortunately, as I discovered some years ago, most of the 19th century records of toymakers who are still in business were destroyed during World War II.

Too Good to Keep. Joe sent on to me a letter he received from someone who wanted to sell a set of 49 slides. Joe's comment: "What kind of an outfit does this guy think we are running?" The subject matter of the slides: nude Japanese girls. As Jack Benny would say, "Wwwwell!"

CAN YOU TELL ME?--QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MAGIC LANTERNS

Q: In a recent issue of the ML Bulletin, Derek Ramsden requested information about Bamforth & Co., Ltd, an English firm which produced lantern slides and postcards made from the slide pictures. Another member has supplied this information.

A: I, too, would like to know more about this company's New York operation. I imagine that Mr. Ramsden is familiar with the "Brief History of Bamforth & Co., Ltd." which was reproduced on page 12 of the April 1978 issue of The New Magic Lantern Journal (Vol. I, #1) published by the British ML Society. Also, Vol. I, #2 carried an excellent article, "James Bamforth" based on a talk given to that society by Robert McMillan. In the "Brief History," the grandson of James Bamforth indicates that the company was established in 1870 and that Bamforth himself painted the backgrounds for the Life Model song slides he produced. It was Bamforth's son who began producing postcards from these slide pictures in 1902, and London and New York offices were opened to cope with the demand for them. This enterprise

continued till 1918, when changing public tastes caused the company to shift to comic cards.

Nancy Bergh

Q: In the January 1981 issue of the Bulletin, Jim Flanagan asked for information about the Victor Animatograph projector. Nancy was also able to supply this.

A: According to a monograph by David H. Shepard published in 1975, the Victor Animatography Company operated from April 1910 until May 1956. The company was named after inventor Alexander F. Victor (1878-1961) who was credited with invention of more than 150 different models of picture-taking and projection equipment. The first Animato-Graph was a film and projector system in which frames of film arranged in a spiral on a flat disc advanced at a slow rate. This machine gave poor focus. Several other models were introduced before the company brought out a 35mm home movie outfit which it also called the Animatograph. This 1914 model used a beater movement to advance the film. The model of the following year used a sprocket device patented by Victor.

Nancy Bergh

Q: Can any of your members supply information about Louis Aimé Augustin le Prince, who projected moving pictures in Leeds, England, in the 1880's? I understand he had done the same thing some years earlier at a school in Washington Heights, N.Y., and he ran a panorama in New York. I am also interested in information about the illustrations Bamforth and others did for the poems of G.R. Sims.

John Jones
20 Hollin Lane
Leeds LS16 5LZ
England

A: For Bamforth information, see above. Can anyone supply any clues about Prince?

Q: Can anyone help me identify the maker of my combination magic lantern and 35 mm movie projector? It is equipped both with a kerosene illuminant and a 98 watt Mazda bulb with tip. The "kiddie slides" measure 1½ x 5" and have circular images. The body is square and has a diamond-shaped metal clip with the initials GB above and N below. The border of the clip is striped in red and blue.

Henry Vanlieshout

A: Apparently my hunch was right when you phoned me from Montana, Dutch. In Collecting Model Trains, (Simmons-Boardman Publishing Corp., 1956), Louis H. Hertz includes an appendix of identification marks on toys. He says "The letter N at the end of a trademark consisting of several initials can generally be assumed to indicate Nuremberg, Germany." The GBN identification was used by Gebrüder Bing (the Bing Brothers) prior to about 1920.

BUY/SELL/TRADE

Wanted: Parts for hand-cranked projectors. During the past year I have been fortunate in being able to add three Edison projection-heads to my collection of early 35mm hand-crank projectors. They are an Edison Exhibition Model (oak front), and Edison Kinesto-scope Underwriters Model (polished nickel front) and Edison Projecting Kinetoscope Underwriters Model Type B (black enamel front with gold "Edison" decal). I am eager to build them into complete units and would appreciate hearing from any member who could assist me in locating the parts I need or who may have any of the following available for purchase: lamphouses and lamphouse carriages, upper and lower spoolboxes, projector stands comprising wooden baseboard with four/five tubular metal legs, slide lens and bracket, arc-lamp or limelight burner. A more complete list of the needed parts can be compiled and sent if necessary.

I am also interested in hearing from other members who share my interest in early hand-crank projectors. Please write:

Allan Osborne
435 Bay Street
Port Melbourne, 3207
Victoria, Australia

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

New Members:

S. Franklin Spira
135-06 Northern Blvd.
Flushing, N.Y. 11354

Principal interest: pre-history of the cinema with emphasis on persistence-of-vision devices, motion slides, optical toys, flip and image dissection devices.

New Members (continued)

David & Barbara Henry
36 Meon Road
London W3 8AN, England

Interests: life model slides of York & Son, books, catalogues and readings. A founder and officer of the British ML Society; also part-time dealer in cinema literature--and both are teachers.

Larry Cohen
616 Bobwhite Lane
Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006

Ph: (215) WI7 5757

Interests: Slides -- will sell

Mrs. John Wilburn
3607 Brownsboro Rd. No. 16
Louisville, Kentucky 40207

Correction:

Richard Balzer
Home phone: (212) 789-6957